(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) by when the proposal is expected to be finalised and implementation initiated; and

(d) the anticipated benefits likely to accrue to Government by this decision?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG): (a) to (d) It has not been possible to grant industry status to tourism by amending IDR Act as there is no manufacture or production of any of the articles mentioned in the first schedule of the Act. However, various incentives like income tax exemption, interest subsidy, reduced customs duty, etc. are already being provided by the Union Government to the tourism sector.

Visit of Foreign Toursists to India

1654. SHRI VEDPRAKASH P. GOYAL: Will the Minister TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) the total number of foreign tourists who visited India during year 1997-98 i.e. upto 31st March, 1998;

(b) whether this number is less than that of tourists visiting in 1996-97;

(c) if so, the reasons therfor; and

(d) the steps being taken to attract more tourists?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG) (a) and (b) Total number of foreign tourists who visited India during 1996-97 and 1997-98 were 23,34,438 and 23,70,985 respectively registering an increase of 1.6% during 1997-98 as compared to 1996-97.

(c) and (d) Does not arise.

Development of Tourist Spots in Karnataka

1655. SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Will the Minister TOURISM be pleased to state;

(a) whether Government have formulated any plan to develop tourist spots in Karnataka during the current financial year;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) The amount of financial assistance allocated for the purpose and spent so far for development of tourism in Karnataka?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG) (a) and (b) The tourism develoment plans for any specific State is prepared by the respective State. The Ministry of Tourism provides financial assistance on the basis of specific project proposals received from the State Governments every year.

(c) During the year 1997-98, the Ministry of Tourism sanctioned financial assistance of Rs. 130.78 lacks for the implementation of tourism projects in Karnataka. The projects for 1998-99 have not yet been identified.

Development of Brahmaputra as a Tourist Destination

1656. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) Whether it is proposed to explore development of the Brahmaputra as tourist destination;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action taken to increase tourism related activities like development of road and rail linkage and amenities for tourists to develop the waterway?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG) (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. The Government of Assam has taken steps to develop tourist activities in Brahmaputra. The steps taken by the State Government in this regard include organising Brahmaputra beach festival, organising rafting expeditions, operating river cruises etc. The State Government has also taken steps to develop road linkages to different tourist destinations.